



Boise National Forest 2014 *Annual Report*



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Flash Flooding Impairs Roadways and Trails

In late July and early August, the Forest experienced significant rainfall that caused flash flooding which impaired several major roadways and trails. Mud flows, deep washouts and fallen logs and rocks led to some temporary closures.

With rainfall up to one inch per hour in some locations, conditions were ripe for soil movement. A 700-foot section of the Middle Fork Boise River Road was completely washed out when a mud slide pushed the river into the road, and another quarter-mile was blocked by mud, logs and rocks. Approximately 25 miles of the road was temporarily closed.

With the goal of making the small Elmore County town of Atlanta accessible during winter, the Atlanta Highway District worked with the Forest and two contractors to repair the road. The Federal Highway Administration approved \$500,000 in Emergency Relief funds for the project. The Local Highway Technical Assistance Council provided project administration



Repairs were completed two weeks early.

and management support. Together, the partners were able to re-open the road ahead of schedule in late October.

Additionally, mud slides along the South Fork Boise River dramatically changed the flow of the river especially downstream of the Danskin Boat Launch. Trees and rocks altered passage for rafters in some sections and some rapid classifications were upgraded due to restricted river flows.

Many trails were also heavily damaged and a flash flood moved the Roaring River Trail Bridge nearly one-half mile.

LEFT: Road repair work involved heavy equipment moving tons of debris.

BELOW: Tons of mud and rocks from Big Five Creek moved the river channel into Middle Fork Boise River Road completely washing out a 700 foot section.



Great Work Completed in 2014

Boise National Forest employees did a fantastic job meeting our goals of caring for the land and serving people.

Highlights include implementing the Scriver Creek Integrated Restoration Project to restore the landscape; enhancing career opportunities for veterans and Job Corps students; focusing restoration on fire recovery; and managing significant flood events affecting Forest transportation systems.

We initiated planning efforts using tools identified in the Farm Bill to reduce insect and disease in the Williams Creek area and alleviate potential catastrophic fire events; and managed a large fire in the Garden Valley urban interface.



Cecilia Seesholtz
Boise National Forest
Supervisor

Building capacity with volunteer emergency responders took a major step with the first annual Boise County Fire Emergency Simulation. Nearly 100 volunteer, rural and agency personnel participated at a full day of training that facilitated better coordination, command structure and communication.

We worked hard to bring veterans into the Forest Service ranks and provide a solid career opportunity. Their leadership skills were a huge boost to the expanding Job Corps Fire Program in partnership with the Idaho Department of Labor.

The effort contributed by Boise Forest Coalition members added to program goals to enhance the forest landscape, provide economic benefits, and build on a partnership effort. I am especially proud of their dedicated focus to develop recommendations for the Emmett Ranger District High Valley area.

Dedicated employees, solid partners, and steady progress in priority areas has shown much can be accomplished.

Significant

Crew 8 on Whiskey Complex within Boise National Forest.



Job Corps Fire Program Presents Broader Fire Experience

The Centennial Job Corps (JCC) Fire Program continued to expand and improve with a strong Boise National Forest partnership. Nearly 50 students were Red Carded as firefighters and fire camp crew members. The firefighting students become part of the Forest's "Fire Crew 8".

The number of fires and days worked grew exponentially from the previous year. Fire Crew 8 students worked on 22 fires with 216 days on assignments. In contrast, the number of days on assignment in 2013 was 69.

A new crew structure included Permanent Seasonal Employee overhead and Wildland Fire Apprentices. This new structure provided the JCC students improved learning opportunities and expanded their exposure to fire careers.

"The students all showed desire, determination, heart, and they wanted to go out and work, to be wildland firefighters", said Mike Towers, Assistant Forest Fire Management Officer. "They want to be placed into jobs and this could be a starting point for their careers."

For the first time, the Forest also hired several military veterans who added leadership skills and mentoring while providing crucial career and job opportunities for them.

Twenty five additional students participated as members of the Fire Camp Crew. They responded to 10 incidents totaling 95 days.

For the first time, the program offered students the opportunity to work in a fire support function at the Boise Dispatch Center. There they learned the fire business function as-well-as dispatch operations.

"This partnership was a great success and we anticipate a continual expansion of the program, perhaps leading to a career trade in wildland fire operations," said Bob Shindelar, Forest Fire Chief.



ABOVE: Crew 8 heads to first fire of the season on Boise National Forest.

BELOW: Camp Crew at Whiskey Complex Incident Command Post receiving a briefing.



Coalition members gather to discuss the High Valley project.

Partnerships

Coalition Brings People Together for Forest Restoration

After two years of work, the Boise Forest Coalition (BFC) finalized recommendations for the High Valley Integrated Restoration Area (HVIRA).

The HVIRA, about 30 miles northeast of Emmett, was selected to address members' interests in natural resources, economic, recreational and community conditions.

They met monthly to develop consensus-based recommendations. Their objectives included restoring forest health, reducing hazard fuels, creating economic prospects, providing recreational opportunities and enhancing fish and wildlife habitats.

They included specific ideas for fish habitat and watershed improvements, fencing and signage, road systems plus vegetation management and fuels reduction. "They were great to work

with," said Richard Newton, Emmett District Ranger. "It is very beneficial for multiple interests to develop excellent information for our NEPA analysis."

The District staff has started the NEPA process. The Coalition's ideas help develop alternatives which are then open to public comment. A decision is expected in early 2016.

The BFC, formed in 2010, brings together multiple interests to craft recommendations for multi-faceted forest projects. Its first project was on the Lowman Ranger District in the Clear Creek drainage. The citizen-led group includes representatives from private land, ranchers, timber, conservation, recreation, State of Idaho agencies and County Commissioners. The group's new project is located between Boise and Idaho City.

Simulation Exercises Prepare Emergency Responders for Real-life Disasters

Partnerships were very much in evidence during a successful Boise County Emergency Responder Simulation in March.

The Boise County Local Emergency Planning Committee developed mock emergency field scenarios to enable emergency responders to hone their skills, improve

response coordination and increase effectiveness during real-life disasters.

Scenarios included a wildfire threatening structures, a mass casualty vehicle accident and a law enforcement incident involving armed suspects.

"An exercise like this gives our responders a chance to practice and learn command and communication skills that would otherwise take many critical incident responses for them to learn in the real world," stated John Roberts, Boise County Emergency Management Coordinator.

Over 80 personnel, involving 10 volunteer fire departments, 4 ambulance districts, Boise County Sheriff's Office, Idaho Department of Land, and the Boise National Forest participated in the daylong event.

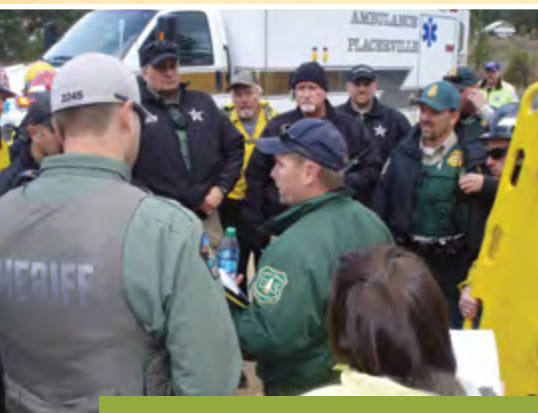
"The simulation exercises were a great success," said Bob Shindelar, Fire Management Officer for the Boise National Forest. "The most important thing that



Medical Simulation

came out of it was building relationships. Not only between fire, EMS and law enforcement, but also relationships with our volunteer agencies that are relied upon in Boise County."

Boise National Forest staff facilitated the event with coordination from the Boise County Emergency Planning Committee, Boise County Sheriff's Office, Idaho Department of Lands, Idaho State Police, National Forest Law Enforcement Officers, Idaho State Communications Center and Central District Health Department.



Coordination for Simulation Exercises

Stewardship Contracts Return the Forest to a More Natural State

Work is in full-swing on the first large-scale vegetation management project put forth for the amended Boise National Forest Plan. The 11,500 acre Scriver Creek Integrated Restoration Project is located in the Middle Fork Payette River watershed.

This project is designed to improve vegetation, hydrology and road systems thereby restoring ecosystem functionality. It includes improvements to wildlife habitat, reducing the threat of uncharacteristically intense wildfires via thinning and addresses existing road system issues.



About 27 miles of road reconstruction was completed.

"I think what we're doing is very creative," said Kathy Geir-Hayes, Forest Ecologist. "We are trying to step away from the traditional way we think about managed ecosystems."

The work began with replacement of 27 culverts and approximately 27 miles of National Forest road reconstruction activities. Soon afterwards, helicopter logging started bringing logs from the forest to landings in the West Fork Scriver Creek area.

The logs, purchased by Evergreen Forest Products, were hauled to their Tamarack sawmill near New Meadows. Evergreen purchased more than 24.6 million board

feet of timber with further harvesting planned.

The Boise Cascade Company purchased 10.7 million board feet from the Pinney Slope Stewardship sale, which was the second and final sale from the Scriver EIS. They too have begun operations.

"The two stewardship contracts generated 35.3 million board feet of lumber and \$3.3 million in receipts," according to Clint VanZile, Forest North Zone Timber Management Assistant. "A majority of funds collected will be placed back into the forest for thinning, watershed improvements and roadwork which is a key Forest Plan goal."



Stewardship

For approximately two months logs were harvested by helicopter across 225 acres.



The new Farm Bill Categorical Exclusion category will be used to analyze the proposed Williams Creek Project.

Emmett RD First in Region to Use Farm Bill

The Ranger District has initiated the environmental analysis for a vegetation management project under the authority and direction of the recently passed Farm Bill. The project is in the Williams Creek area about 30 miles north of Boise.

Initial results indicate that the District can use the new Categorical Exclusion category defined in the most recent Farm Bill to document the effects of the proposed project. The Williams Creek project proposes treating an estimated 1,585 acres affected by insect and disease infestations. Treatment would include wood product removal, non-commercial thinning and fuel abatement treatments.

The project was identified by Emmett Ranger District personnel as meeting Farm Bill specifications and reviewed by the Boise Forest Coalition before being forwarded to Governor Butch Otter. The project was accepted and approved by the Department of Agriculture in late 2014.

According to Emmett District Ranger Richard Newton, "this project would not have moved forward or been successful without recommendations and input from the Boise Forest Coalition. It could produce an estimated 8 to 10 million board feet of timber for the local mills, benefit the local economy and improve Forest health."

Whiskey Complex Largest in Active Fire Season

The fire season began with a large number of fires due, in part, to record low fuel moisture. However, the total number of acres burned was kept relatively small with 122 total fire starts burning approximately 9,170 acres. Heavy rainfall in August significantly reduced burned acreage for the year.

By comparison, in 2013 there were 134 fires with approximately 139,280 acres involved. This included the large and destructive Elk Complex which consumed over 131,250 acres.

At just under 9,500 acres, the Whiskey Complex was the largest fire in 2014. It began with several lightning caused small fires on July 13th within the Emmett Ranger District. Rich Harvey's Type 1 Great Basin Incident Management Team assumed command on July 16. At its peak, there were over 1,100 personnel involved. Public and firefighter safety goals were successfully met with no serious injuries or loss of life.

After containment on July 27th, rehabilitation analysis began immediately. This involved BAER, reforestation and salvage timber evaluations, and road maintenance by either Boise County or the Boise National Forest. Timber sale managers found that limited salvage opportunities existed.

Field assessments determined that 93% of the area had a burn severity of low-to-moderate. Although this minimized the need for significant emergency response, several treatments were proposed. These included culvert replacement to better prepare for potential increased water runoff, rapid response to non-native and invasive plants which could establish seed and safety signs.

The Whiskey Complex fire was the largest on the Forest in 2014 with 9,500 acres burned.

Helicopter dropping water near homes.

Fire Response

Newly Hired Veterans Prove Invaluable as Wildland Firefighters

A job fair held specifically for military veterans interested in careers as wildland firefighters proved to be a win-win for everyone involved. The veteran job fair, in conjunction with Idaho Department of Labor, resulted in the hiring of 26 veterans into the Forest fire program.

"There was a high unemployment rate for veterans in the Treasure Valley, so we wanted to supply job opportunities to them," said Mike Towers, Assistant Forest Fire Management Officer. "With the leadership skills and work ethic they bring, it was a perfect fit into the fire program."

cruitment Appointment, a special hiring authority designed to appoint qualified veterans without competition.

"It was a great success," states Bob Shindelar, Forest Fire Management Officer. "About 80% of the veterans hired completed the fire season."

Life experiences acquired during their military service proved invaluable during the fire season. They are familiar with command structure, understood risk and tended to be physically fit.

One particular success involved a Vietnam veteran who was homeless when he was hired as a fire lookout. He now has a home of his own, has renewed communications with his estranged family, and will return to the lookout in 2015.

Job fairs were held specifically for military veterans resulting in 26 hires into the Boise National Forest Fire Program.



RIGHT: Heavy equipment working to re-establish natural stream flow
BELOW: Completed road restoration



of award



Cascade Ranger District and Nez Perce Tribe Awarded for River Restoration Project

The Cascade Ranger District was presented the 2014 Riparian Challenge Award from the Western Division of the American Fishery Society. The honor recognized the work done on the South Fork Salmon River Watershed Improvement project with the Nez Perce Tribe.

The project involves obliterating more than 100 miles of road prisms from hillsides near the South Fork Salmon River. This is done by removing old dirt roads and reshaping the hillsides to match the adjoining mountain slope contour. About 10.5 miles were reshaped in 2014, bringing the total since 2012 to about 100 miles. With funding another 6 miles is planned in 2015.

The primary objective is to reduce sediment by returning the hillside to its natural hydrological flow. "The priority is to reduce fine sediment delivery to important Chinook salmon spawning areas where sediment is detrimental to egg survival," accord-

ing to Gary Harris, Forest North Zone Hydrologist.

"The Tribe's role involves collecting baseline watershed information to identify problem areas impacting ESA listed fish species," said Wesley Keller, Tribal McCall Watershed Project Leader. "Once problem areas are identified we coordinate to find a solution. The Forest Service performs the environmental evaluation and then we split the restoration costs."

Keller says the Tribe considers this project being all about their roots. Their ceded territory encompasses the Payette and Boise National Forests. "The mission is to restore aquatic ecosystems using a holistic approach encompassing entire watersheds from ridge-top to ridge-top," said Keller. "This restoration work has its roots in exercising Tribal sovereignty and protecting rights reserved under the Nez Perce Treaty of 1855 with the United States Federal Government."



Hydrologist, Gary Harris on a 2-year rehabilitated road

Guide to Ponderosa Pine Scenic Byway Now Available

Visitors have yet another way to experience and enjoy the Forest, thanks to a new Boise-to-Stanley State Highway 21 Wildlife Viewing Guide. The Boise National Forest, along with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and Sawtooth National Forest developed the guide in partnership with Idaho's Watchable Wildlife program.

The viewing guide pinpoints 18 locations where travelers can stop



to learn about wildlife, fish, wildflowers and pollinators that inhabit the area.

"The guide has been hugely popular with the public," said Edna Rey-Vizgirdas, Forest Botanist and a guide initiator. "It is even the most popular publication for the partner agencies. We ran 10,000 guides for the first printing, and we are nearly out of them."

The viewing guide is available free as a printed brochure, but also can be downloaded from each partners websites.



Restoration

BAER Work Completed for 2013 Fires

The monumental task of completing emergency stabilization and rehabilitation of over 236,000 acres of charred land from 2013's Elk and Pony Complexes continued in 2014.

Many partners aided in the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) including 3000 acres of aerial seeding through the assistance of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Bureau of Land Management. Another 2,000 acres received straw mulch applications due to high burn severity.

Over 11,600 acres were treated to minimize noxious weed expansion mostly in the South Fork Boise River area.

Other BAER work included drainage improvements on over 150 miles of roads, replacement of 20 culverts and posting safety signs.

"The BAER work went well with good partnerships and getting the initial emergency response work done," stated Mike Brady, District Fire Management Officer and BAER Coordinator, "but a year isn't

enough time to complete all the restoration needed for fires this size."

To respond to additional rehabilitation and restoration needs the Ranger District has begun NEPA analysis for additional projects which the BAER program could not legally complete.

Trout Unlimited and Idaho Department of Fish and Game sponsored volunteer work to plant shrubs and trees along the South Fork Boise River. Volunteers also planted 8,000 seedlings on about 100 acres of burned land. In partnership with the Elmore County Highway District, 4 damaged bridges were replaced or repaired. Approximately 5 miles of burned fence was removed and new fence constructed by range permittees. Another 12 miles of fence was constructed under a contract.

Other projects planned include grass seeding and planting shrubs to rehabilitate 8,500 acres of important big game winter range and tree planting to restore forested lands.

Thousands of acres of the Elk Complex received straw mulch due to the severity of the burn.



Facilities Upgrade



Mountain Home Ranger District In September, the District office moved to a new location. The 6,200 square foot office and 3,200 square foot warehouse are located on Industrial Way in Mountain Home just off State Highway 20. Besides providing more space, the new facility is more energy efficient.



Cascade Ranger District The historic Stolle Meadows Guard Station was overhauled to near original condition. Doors were enlarged to meet ADA/ABA requirements and replaced with period appropriate doors. Log ends on the lower courses of the building were repaired, the roof re-shingled and the chimney and woodstove repaired to mitigate safety concerns. The cook stove, propane lines and propane tanks were also replaced for safety reasons. The one-room cabin was built in 1914 and is part of the Forest's rental program.